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## Nature is All the Trend – The Germans are Hiking Again



Never before have so many people gone out into nature in their leisure time as they do today. And people for whom pure impressions of nature are not enough simply try out new trends such as night hiking, GPS hiking or geocaching.

Seeing, hearing, and smelling. Just walking off, escaping the hustle and bustle of everyday life and enjoying nature. It has seldom been possible to describe a trend using such few and simple words, expressing what a large part of the population is seeking in their leisure time today. Nature sociologist Rainer Brämer is the honorary chairman of the German Hiking Institute in Marburg and has been occupying himself intensively for many years with the Germans' rediscovered hobby, hiking.


For years, this natural sport was regarded as a gloomy and obsolete activity for elderly wearers of felt hats with odd rituals, frumpy gear and sometimes weird songs. That all changed in the mid-1990s. Today, as many as 34 million Germans describe themselves as "hikers" according to the Hiking Institute. Yesterday's marginal group is now a mass phenomenon, average hikers are no longer solitary, elderly eccentrics, but well-educated people with a need to communicate, aged in their mid to late forties. What has happened?

### The feeling of happiness from nature

For Brämer, the reasons for this development are quite clear. While he concedes that hiking is not the "ultimate kick or the adrenalin-filled fun leisure activity", it is precisely this that stressed-out city dwellers are seeking today. "We have become people who sit and do mental work and that is why we need exercise to wind down," says the expert, adding: "Walks in nature ensure that we can clear our heads."

This feeling is confirmed by the writer Manuel Andrack in an interview. When Harald Schmidt's co-presenter talks about hiking, he enthuses about the "true feeling of happiness" that comes over him when he discovers new landscapes. Andrack wishes to experience nature intensively, and to rediscover it on each new hike. "I am always keen to try out something new and that is why I rarely take the same path twice," says the writer, who has collected his hiking experiences in the book *Wandern – Das deutsche Mittelgebirge für Amateure und Profis*. On forays into nature, he is "mentally stimulated" by new impressions and unforgettable moments. Many new ideas come to him, he says, when walking in nature.

The positive effect of hiking on the human psyche is also scientifically recognised. According to experts, even just looking at beautiful landscapes lowers your blood pressure and promotes a feeling of relaxation. Physically, too, hiking is the ideal sport, as it strengthens your heart, circulation, metabolism and breathing.




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hiking trails, even with this variety, new trend are already on their way. Recently, naked hiking, night hiking and barefoot hiking have become very popular. People who are close to nature on the one hand but also enthusiastic about technology on the other take part in geocaching, a kind of treasure hunting game through woods and fields. GPS hiking, too, or Nordic trekking, a more extreme form of Nordic walking, are enjoying increasing popularity. Brämer is sure that "with this variety on offer, there is something for everyone. The main thing is that it is in nature, fun and healthy."

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